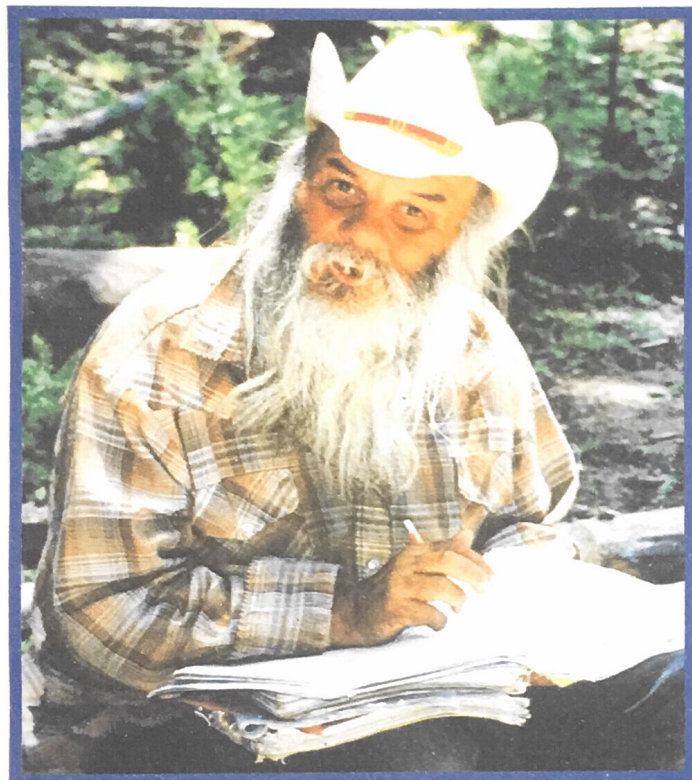




# Rainbow Family

## Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.  
Interviews with Rainbow  
Family of Living Light  
folks conducted between  
1977 and 2008.  
Scanned in 2018.  
Jodey Bateman may be  
contacted on Facebook.*

03.B

MONTE TIDWELL - "Diary of the  
New Mexico 1977  
Gathering"

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Monte Tidwell - Diary of the New Mexico  
Gathering 25

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[A number of anthropology students have done studies of Rainbow Gatherings. Monte was taking a class in anthropology field work at Oklahoma University. The class requires direct study of some community or cultural activity. I told Monte about the Rainbow Gathering and he hitched with me to New Mexico to check it out. He was required by his class to keep a diary of his research, which he gave to me. What follows is almost all of Monte's diary.]  
June 22, 1977. My first day here. The majority of people here at this moment are "road" people. They are mostly young itinerant workers who travel constantly from job to job. There are approximately 300 people present now, scattered throughout the valleys and mountains here. The central focal point is the kitchen area from which meals are dispensed and where people gather to talk. It is a seemingly intimate atmosphere, as most people know many of the others. People whose names are not known are called "brother" or "sister."

There seems to be a commune circuit that most of these people use for places to stay. When asked where they are from, some common replies are "everywhere", "nowhere" and "here." Some people reply that they alternate from commune to commune depending upon conditions within each commune and the season.

The popular conception of a counter culture as being longhairs buying all the latest records and smoking dope has become too commercialized according to all the people I've talked to here.

I talked to one person who has assumed a leadership role. He said that all of the people here have been down and out before coming to the Family. He believes these are the sensitive people



in our culture who value nature, experience and each other. The atmosphere here is very supportive. Everyone is much different than the rest of the society in which they live. It's very difficult to tell where the organization and leadership is coming from. People often assume leadership roles the moment they arrive.

There is a fire hazard here in the national forest, so some people have assumed the role of becoming fire patrollers. They wander around from campfire to campfire and often are quite strict in their demands. The main gathering site is a two mile hike to where the main kitchen is located.

There are a group of people camped in the parking lot who seem to be directing most of the activity. These people, I've been told, have been with the Family the longest. They make sure no one brings in alcohol, fire arms or firecrackers. They remind people of the fire hazard and of their obligation to keep all campsites very clean. They greet people by saying "Welcome home." Some of them seem very tense because of the pressure of the leadership roles they've taken.

There is a shortage of tobacco here and one of the organizers was screaming "Be patient, be patient goddamit. We'll have some tobacco if you'll just wait."

Everyone brought in as much food as they could carry and it was all left at the main kitchen site. The meals are cooked by self-appointed cooks who change at every meal.

The composition of the group seems mainly to be young people who have been on the road for a long time. For many, the gathering is the coming together of all the vagabonds, transients and hobos. There is a strong working class element here. Migrant workers, people who work in crafts,



those that travel from job to job. There is a lot of rowdiness and minor arguing (mainly over values) mixed in with the desired atmosphere of happiness, love and brotherhood etc. There is a lot of peer pressure to talk in terms of love, energy, faith, brotherhood etc. People speak in vague, flowery terms and are very hard to pin down with questions concerning substantive facts. It seems that most of the people here have adopted names. Some I've met are Wind Song, Rainbow Hawk, Little Fox, Coyote, Bear, Quicksilver, Wind Dance, Sundown, Dancing Bear and Freedom.

There is one group here called the Christ Family, who I'm told, attend every year. They seem to be in conflict with the Rainbow Family over some of their values. They wear three keys around their neck that symbolize no sex, no killing, no materialism. The first or primary conflict with the Family is over sex. The Christ Family people are celibates who wear robes because they believe pants draw attention to the genitals. They are very averse to being touched. I observed one Family member embrace a Christ Family member whose reaction was one of shock and disgust. The Christ Family also don't believe in music, while many Rainbow Family members bring instruments and make music all day long and much of the night. The Christ Family's primary mission is to convert people to their beliefs. They always camp together and separate from the other camps which cluster around the main kitchen camp.

There are a few older people. One 43-year-old ex-physicist with whom I've talked says he comes to all the gatherings. He's now studying astrology and various mystical traditions. He lives most of the time in a commune in Lake County, California but he told me that he's on the road much of the time also. He has been to three Rainbow Gatherings and declares himself to be a member by virtue of that. He knows most of the people here



and despite his age, behaves as young as everyone else.

Another old man brought his family all the way from Oregon in a beat up old station wagon. He's a migrant laborer who picks fruit. He met many Rainbow Family members who followed the fruit picking and he decided to attend this year's gathering.

There seems to be a large number of communal groups and other cults who attend the gathering and thus come under the name of the Rainbow Family. After the gathering they assume their semi-autonomous distinction from the Family, but seem to have no qualms about considering themselves part of the Rainbow Family and their group at the same time. The Rainbow Family is open to anyone who wants to attend the gatherings and even extends invitations to many groups separate from their own.

It's hard to draw conclusions about what the Rainbow Family is at this point.

The leadership and organization aspect is the most difficult to pin down now. Group composition is a little easier. The people here already talking about "when the college kids arrive." This seems to be a class distinction more than anything. They consider the "college kids" to be anyone more affluent, maybe more into spiritualism or those who who come to the gathering just because it's happening.

The reasons I've been given for coming here by the people I've talked to vary. Some say they want to get back to nature and away from the "civilized" world. Others say they want to be with their brothers and sisters and get high with them. Others come, they say, because they get free meals and good company. Some come to spread a "message" and convert people. Some, like me, come to find out what the Rainbow Family is all about.

There is much tolerance and a kind of stoic patience exhibited by the main organizers who are camped in the parking



lot. They seem to realize that as many different kinds of people and the numbers of them that are arriving, that it is impossible to organize efficiently. They can't exercise full leadership and they know it. They rely on most of the organization to be carried out by the Family members who assume responsibility for what's happening. One of the original visionaries arrived today and has been extremely quiet about everything.

I've been told that periodically the Family holds councils at the gatherings. It is patterned after an Indian council in which a stick is passed around and whoever has the stick can speak his mind with no interruptions. Anyone who wants can join the council and it seems from there most of the suggestions for joint action and co-ordinated effort emanate.

There are many people running around nude, but most people are dressed. Clothing styles remind me of gypsy people, as there are many bandannas, necklaces, loose pants, vests, colorful patchwork on many items, other elaborate jewelry and most everyone is barefoot.

Already there are people here from all over the country and some from places such as Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. I'm camped with a brother from Hawaii called Thai.

There are a few persons here that would be classified by most people in our culture as prime candidates for a mental hospital. They are probably drawn to the gathering because self-expression in almost any form is tolerated here as long as it remains harmless. There is one very nice fellow who claims to be Jesus Christ. He is constantly at the service of others and does not attempt any proselytization as far as I've observed. There are some that wander in and out of various camps mumbling, talking very illogically and with a glazed look in their eyes. It could be from drugs or maybe just a temporary schizophrenia.

There are many varieties of drugs for inducing altered



states of consciousness. Of course there is much marijuana. A man just came in from Santa Fe with seven pounds of grass. He sat it down in the main kitchen area and told everyone to help themselves. Generosity and straight bartering are valued here. Money is virtually non-existent in the camp and is almost a taboo conversational topic. One of the "leaders" I talked with last night said "These people have hardly anything, but everybody brings what they do have, including their talents. All needs somehow manage to be satisfied with group effort. Don't ask me how it happens. It just does."

Other drugs present include peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, acid and there is belladonna (jimson weed) growing in the valley. The "leaders" in the parking lot are discouraging everyone from doing any belladonna although Rainbow Doc (who was a second year medical student before he became what he is) did some last night.

The vast majority of people here, I believe hold the conviction that the rest of society is in for a crisis culminating in collapse. Of all that I've talked with, they believe that what they are doing is adopting a life style that will survive that crisis. They say things like "In times of great crisis take refuge with the poor." This topic of impending doom is a major conversational topic and is one part of the ideology which serves as a justification for doing what they are doing.

Another major topic of conversation are the "road" stories that everyone has, including myself. These are a chance for some individual ego inflation—a chance to boast and gain recognition, it seems.

Although I haven't seen it yet, there is a sweat house built somewhere in the area. This year the gathering was called in the name of "healing." Last year it was "peace." There are people here who claim to be healers. I heard one talking of healing someone



earlier today, at the sweat house. He said that the person had a problem in their chest, although I'm not sure what type of problem. He said that the person had a good "sweat" but was very reluctant to let go of what was in his chest. He said he had never seen anyone hold on that hard before.

Communications: I'm learning that most people heard about the gathering by word of mouth. They basically just knew where and when it was to be. The news was spread by the people who travel almost constantly. Many Family members maintain contact through the mail and this disseminates the news to some. The main organizers (I'm not sure who they are at this point) begin organizing the gatherings immediately after the one just held. This requires choosing a site and conducting negotiations with the officials who are in charge of the chosen area. The Rainbow Family, I'm told, has a good reputation among park officials because they don't damage the sites and leave them very clean.

Thursday June 23 - I participated in the evening meal "ceremony" last night. It seems that what I believed to be the main kitchen is actually one of the kitchens. There are three, I think. I just followed everyone as they were saying it was mealtime, down into the middle of the canyon. There were five drums made of hollow logs with heads made of rawhide in the center of the meal area. After one person got a beat going, everyone else on the drums followed it. People holding bowls clapped them against their hands, some just clapped their hands, others danced. This, I was told, was to inform everyone camping in the hills that it was time for the evening meal gathering. People continued to come out hills for some time and the drums continued for approximately an hour. Anyone who wanted could play when someone else got tired. People would yell and scream at times when the drumming got particularly intense. Some would chant things like "More better, more simple" "More love, more better" or "God is love."

Digression: I almost forgot. Before the drumming began there



were about 100 people sitting around the fire built in the meal area. One or two people were taking turns reciting their poetry or telling a story. People talked among themselves while this was happening, but most listened. Then the drums were brought out when the stories and poems died down.

After it seemed that everyone had arrived, the drumming died down. Then someone, Michael John (one of the "leaders" who is into spiritualism) said "form a circle." Everyone clasped hands and formed a huge circle of maybe 300 to 350 people around the food. There was a black man wearing a purple robe with a hood that seemed to be in charge of dispensing the food. When everyone was in the circle, this man offered thanks to the spirits above and below for giving the food to nourish our bodies. Then everyone began making the "OM" sound and raised their clasped hands. This lasted until it died down by itself. (Approximately five minutes). Then a few people whooped and hollered.

One of the "leaders" announced that we would form a spiral, with him leading that would close slowly until everyone was in several small circles and seated. I was told that at each meal the "ceremony" differed and that most of the time new things were added and other parts dropped. They were in one sense spontaneous but in another sense organized by whomever thought of something, usually one of the "leaders." The "leaders", I believe, are those who have been with the Family the longest and just assume these roles. Some, I'm told, are often ignored when they make suggestions but there are some "leaders" whose advice or suggestions are followed most of the time.

After we were seated, the meal began being served. Patience is very necessary when eating communally with so many people. One person I observed walked from the circle directly to the



food and began dishing some out. He was told to wait and return to his seat. He began screaming that he was too hungry to wait and became very angry. Dancing Bear, one of the ladies serving the meal, said "Let the brother do what he wants." So he got his food and returned to his seat. Many people booed and jeered and those around him moved away. Someone screamed "Kick him out of the tribe!" He was ignored and stayed to himself the rest of the night. He was in essence, socially ostracized for exhibiting impatience, which is obviously an undesirable quality in the Family.

Most people brought their own bowls but those who didn't ate out of others' bowls. Spoons were short, so many people ate with sticks or with their hands. The meal consisted of a vegetable dish made in our camp which included rice, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, carrots, garlic, soy sauce, and spices. A salad was served along with a delicious soup made with onions and tomatoes. The bread was crisp, flat corn meal patties somewhat like tortillas but thicker and spicier. There was plenty of food for everyone. I shared my dish with the person next to me and I got quite full.

During the meal one of the original visionaries announced a council meeting to be held at noon today on top of a mesa that overlooks this valley. Another leader/organizer announced that one of the burros that was carrying in medical supplies had broken loose and dumped medical supplies all over the valley. He requested anyone who found any of these supplies to bring them to the medical tent.

After the meal the drumming resumed with many people joining in the dancing and singing. There were other musical instruments brought out. A violin, flutes, a saxophone and guitars. Some stood around the fire, some sat and talked, some danced, played and sang. People gradually dispersed back to their camps and I left before the whole thing ended.

I've learned that at the north end of the canyon is a camp everyone calls the "Security Camp." I'm not quite sure what their



function is right now. I've talked with Nick who's in security, but all he was doing was carrying supplies from the parking lot. At the south end of the canyon is the medical tent and also, I believe, the site where healing ceremonies are to take place. Yesterday, I was told, some people erected a coyote tent. This was accompanied by ceremonial activities which I missed.

Many people have left our camp to go eat breakfast at the meal site. I'm busy doing this, so I guess I missed breakfast. This morning it rained which made everyone happy, it seems, because of the fire hazard, even though it creates a little discomfort.

I awoke and went to our fire and many were gathered around it making coffee, herbal tea and passing around milk and honey. Someone had brought in three cans of Bugler tobacco and those of us who smoke began rolling.

Another taboo conversational topic is time. Someone this morning asked what time it was. The responses were, "Who cares?" "It doesn't matter" and "Why do you have a doctor's appointment?" He never did find out what time it was, and I don't know, myself, right now.

Another black man arrived this morning named Diamond Tooth Jim, and he does have a diamond in his front incisor. He said he couldn't stay because he only ate raw vegetables and couldn't eat cooked food with us. I've seen four blacks this far at the gathering. Absolutely no sign of prejudice from anyone. There are many Spanish speakers here from different places, mostly Chicanos. Carlitos, from Guatemala, seems to be a very respected member of the Family. Kilo, from Mexico, is one of the organizers who has been with the Family a long time. He is camped in the parking lot with most of the organizers and I haven't met him yet.

The Family discourages people from bringing dogs to the gathering, but there are, I'm told, always very many that are brought. They are a constant nuisance at meal time, but otherwise have been no problem as far as I can tell.



Before supper Friday 23 - Council. Also I went down to the south end of the canyon today and visited the sweat house, the healing area where the peyote tipi is located and the other main kitchen. The sweat house is a small domed hut covered with canvas and cloth in a makeshift manner. Rocks are heated outside in a fire and brought in and placed in the center of the sweat house. People who desire to be healed in any fashion usually go in for a sweat.

Water is poured over the rocks to create steam inside the house.

There are many people sitting outside the sweat house nude.

The sweat house is located close to the healing area.

Saturday a.m. 24 - The healing area was chosen to be where it is, I'm told because of all the "energy" located in that spot. There are mineral springs in the area and a few herbs growing that they use medicinally. It is located in a narrow side canyon off to the east of the main canyon. Also at the mouth of that side canyon is located the other kitchen (there are only two, I've found out.)

The person who seems to be in charge of that kitchen is the black man who serves at all the meals. It is set up like ours.

There is a very large cauldron in which they make the main dish, several large buckets for making things that don't need cooking, a large grill for frying things on and some wooden cabinets containing spices, utensils etc. Almost exactly like ours. Both have the fires in the center contained in holes in the ground that have to be dug out ever so often.

The healing lodge is a short hike from there. There are two tipis erected - one for the medical personnel to stay and treat minor injuries, the other for healing spiritual ailments and holding peyote meetings. The first tipi is about 15 feet tall and covered with white canvas. The peyote tipi is about 20 feet tall and is covered with canvas that is brightly designed with paint.

Sunny, a registered nurse, runs the healing lodge. There were many people with cuts and bruises who were soaking them in



the springs and being treated by Sunny and her helpers. They used herbal soaks and teas quite often as cures for "minor" things but also had "modern" medical supplies.

Crazy Wolf, a man who appears to be in his 30's, was there having his ankle soaked and wrapped with an Ace bandage. He had sprained it the night before when I had helped him cross the river. He told me that he had "run" a few peyote ceremonies for the Rainbow Family. He called it being a "road man." He told me about a vision he had had that told him to announce a peyote meeting and run it for the Family. This happened at last year's gathering in Montana. He said he had been to many meetings as the cedar man for an Arapaho Indian named Antelope. He said he knew how to build the peyote altar and when to start the drumming and things like that. He said he didn't know when the first peyote meeting called this year would be.

Last night at dinner, we carried the food down from our kitchen to the same area in the valley as the night before. This time people just milled around talking, waiting for others to arrive. It was still sprinkling a little and the clouds threatened rain so I guess they wanted to rush things a little. The drums were not brought out, but a few people began hitting their bowls or clapping. There was a lot of rowdiness and yelling, but eventually everyone formed a circle around the food. It was not much larger than yesterday's, but a lot of the people are expected to arrive this weekend.

After we formed the circle and made the "OM" sound until it died down, someone announced that we should just close in slowly and form two concentric circles around the servers, but to allow enough room for them to walk around and serve. This was done very orderly. There was again more than enough food. There was split pea soup made at our camp and chapatties (the tortilla-like bread), salad, lentil casserole, cashew butter



a rice dish.

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After everyone had eaten, one of the original visionaries, Garrick, got up and announced the decisions reached at the council. The purpose of the council was to negotiate with the park officials and the county sheriff and also to confer with them on where the main camp should be located. Garrick first said that the park officials agreed to carry no weapons when around the Rainbow Gathering site but in turn they wanted no marijuana waved around in their faces.

They (the rangers) said they wanted no one camping in the valley because of ecological reasons. If many people were to trample the meadow grasses, it would be years before it would grow back. Also no more meals in the valley and everyone was to stay on trails. This was agreed to, and Garrick urged everyone to please comply. The main camp and eating place from now on is to be in Burnt Corral Canyon, not far from the healing lodge. It is a sandy, alluvial plain, said Garrick, with plenty of room for erecting many tipis and room for meals to be served. He said in choosing the site, they took into consideration ecological reasons, the Indian burial ground sites, access, amount of space, flood danger and many other things.

He said tomorrow (which is today) construction of tipis could begin there and he asked for volunteers to help prepare the site and dig "shitters." He said the two kitchens, the healing area and the security camp would remain where they were. He said a supply depot and welcome committee would be established at the entrance to the valley. Here people "would be given welcome 101 and told not to shit in the rivers" he said.

Also the Family is expecting two truckloads of fruit to be brought in by people they had sent out to pick fruit in Arizona. These and other supplies are arriving every day, such as lodge poles, fire grills etc.

Barry, another of the original visionaries, got up and announced that they were in contact with the Federal officials and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) about finding a permanent



piece of land for all Rainbow people who care to live together forever. This brought a big cheer. I was told that this is a big dream of Barry's and that he works on it every year. He speaks of the family as a tribe. The other visionary who started the group is very quiet. He is named Chuck Wind Song.

Also brought up at dinner was a plea concerning two brothers who had been placed in jail in El Paso for trying to bring huge quantities of peyote to the gathering. Garrick asked for donations for gas to send some of their friends to El Paso to contact a lawyer. The Family asked the rangers to be recognized as a church and to allow the "brothers" and the "medicine" to come to the gathering. The rangers replied they were

the wrong officials to talk to about that, but that they would put the Family with someone who could help. Maybe.

The rangers also agreed to supply a helicopter in case of serious emergency, but said that the Family would have to supply their own radio contact with the rangers. Garrick asked if anyone had a CB and battery to donate to use at the healing lodge. Jay Sun, a Family member who lives in this area and helped negotiate for this gathering, stated that Beaverhead Ranger Station is the most isolated station in the whole continental US. No telephones, no electricity. Just generators for radio and lights. I don't know whether or not they got the CB.

Any time volunteers are asked for, more than enough people are obtained. Everyone seems willing and eager to do their share. Co-operation in group effort is no big problem. Besides the key leaders, people assume leadership roles whenever they are needed. I've seen some hostility and arguing over this, but not much.

Security camp was the scene of a big argument yesterday. It was being used as the drop-off point for supplies and